

**UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA**  
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A Study on the Relationship between Self-esteem and Academic  
Achievement of Iranian students

**BY:**

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**Dedicated to my family**

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## **Table of contents**

<b>Acknowledgement</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Table of contents</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>List of tables and figures</b>	<b>viii</b>
<b>List of appendixes</b>	<b>ix</b>
<b>Abstrak (Malay Version)</b>	<b>x</b>
<b>Abstract (English Version)</b>	<b>xi</b>

## **Chapter I**

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

<b>1.1 Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.2 Background of the study</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1.3 Statement of the problem</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>1.4 The importance of the study</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>1.5 The objective of the study</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>1.6 Research questions</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>1.7 Research hypotheses</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>1.8 Operational definition</b>	<b>17</b>

## **Chapter II**

### **2.0 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

<b>2.1 Introduction</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>2.2 Knowledge about self</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>2.3 Self-concept</b>	<b>21</b>

2.3.1	Self-image	21
2.3.2	Ideal-self	22
2.4	Self-esteem	
2.4.1	Definition of self-esteem	23
2.4.2	The concept of self-esteem	23
2.4.3	Categories of self-esteem	25
2.4.4	The levels self-esteem	27
2.4.5	The sources of self-esteem	28
2.4.4	The affecting factors	29
2.5	The relationship between self-esteem and learning	31
2.6	Self-esteem and students	32
2.7	Self-esteem and academic achievement	33
2.8	Self-esteem and religion	34
2.9	Related theories	35
2.9.1	Karen Horney's theory	35
2.9.2	Alfred Adler's theory	38
2.9.3	Abraham Maslow' theory	39
2.9.4	Carl Rogers' theory	42
2.9.5	Stanley Coopersmith's theory	44
2.9.6	A summary of related theories	46
2.10	Previous related studies	48
2.10.1	Studies on self-esteem and achievement	48
2.10.2	Studies on self-esteem and birth order	58

2.10.3 Studies on self-esteem and gender	59
2.10.4 Studies on self-esteem and religiosity	59
2.11 Research framework	61
2.12 Conclusion	62
 <b>Chapter III</b>	
<b>3.0 METHODOLOGY</b>	
3.1 Introduction	63
3.2 Research design	63
3.3 The variables	63
3.4 The sample	64
3.5 The sampling procedures	65
3.6 The research instruments	66
3.6.1 The demographic information questionnaire	67
3.6.2 Coopersmith self-esteem inventory	67
3.6.3 Religiosity questionnaire	69
3.7 Pilot study	69
3.8 The administration of the instrument	71
3.4 Analyzing of data	71
 <b>Chapter IV</b>	
<b>4.0 FINDINGS</b>	
4.1 Introduction	76
4.2 Descriptive statistic results	77
4.2.1 The profile of the respondents	77

4.2.2 The level of self-esteem	77
4.2.3 The level of religiosity	77
4.3 Inferential statistics data	79
4.3.1 Self-esteem with gender	79
4.3.2 Self-esteem with birth order	79
4.3.3 Self-esteem with religiosity	80
4.3.4 Self-esteem with academic achievement	81
 Chapter V	
5.0 DISCUSSION	
5.1 Introduction	82
5.2 The summary of the results	82
5.3 Discussion	83
5.4 Limitations of the study	87
5.4 Suggestions	89
 Bibliography	90

## LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

<b>Figure 2.1 The self-concept</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Figure 2.3 The circular relationship between performance, self-confidence and self-esteem</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Figure 2.4 Theoretical framework</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>Table 3.1 The variables and corresponding measuring instruments</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>Table 3.2 The distribution of first year High school students in Tabriz across the five educational zones</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>Table 3.3 The number of students in the sample from each educational zone</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>Table 4.1 The research objectives</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>Table 4.2 Frequency distribution of sample students in five educational zones of Tabriz</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>Table 4.3 The frequency distribution of samples according to the gender</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>Table 4.4 Frequency distribution of birth order in the family</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>Table 4.5 Variation distribution of samples' GPA in the first term of current year</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>Table 4.6 Frequency distribution of samples' failure</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>Table 4.7 Frequency distribution of self-esteem's rate of samples</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>Table 4. 8 The variation distribution of sample's religiosity</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>Table 4.9 Test of score differences the rate fo samples' self-esteem based on their sex</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>Table 4.10 Pearson correlation coefficient test between self-esteem and birth order</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>Table 4.11 Pearson correlation coefficient test between self-esteem and religiosity</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>Table 4.12 Pearson correlation coefficient test for investigating between self-esteem and academic achievement</b>	<b>81</b>



## **LIST OF APENDIXES**

**Appendix A Demographic information (English Version)**

**Appendix B Demographic information (Persian Version)**

**Appendix C Coopersmith self-esteem inventory (English Version)**

**Appendix D Coopersmith self-esteem inventory (Persian Version)**

**Appendix E Questions about religiosity beliefs (English Version)**

**Appendix F Questions about religiosity beliefs (Persian Version)**

**Appendix G Reliability of Coppersmith's self-esteem inventory**

## **Abstrak**

Kajian ini cuba mengukur perhubungan antara estim sendiri dan pencapaian akademik dalam kalangan pelajar di negara Iran. Tujuan lain kajian ini adalah untuk mencari perhubungan antara estim sendiri dengan jantina, kedudukan kelahiran dan kepatuhan kepada ajaran agama. Penyelidikan ini menggunakan kaedah atau soal selidik dengan menggunakan Inventori Estim Kendiri Coopersmith yang mengandungi 58 item. Sampel yang terlibat dalam kajian ini terdiri daripada 460 orang pelajar tahun satu di beberapa buah sekolah menengah (225 lelaki dan 235 perempuan) yang telah dipilih secara rawak dalam kalangan lima zon pendidikan di Tabriz, Iran. Untuk tujuan analisis data, perisian SPSS telah digunakan. Analisis statistik yang telah dijalankan ialah ujian Pearson correlation, ujian-t, dan ANOVA. Keputusan menunjukkan bahawa terdapat perhubungan yang lemah tetapi signifikan antara estim sendiri dan pencapaian akademik pelajar-pelajar sekolah menengah di Tabriz yang mengambil bahagian. Walau bagaimanapun, tidak terdapat perbezaan yang signifikan dari segi tahap estim sendiri di kalangan kedua-dua jantina pelajar. Seterusnya, keputusan kajian menunjukkan bahawa tidak terdapat sebarang perhubungan antara estim sendiri dan kedudukan kelahiran, tetapi menunjukkan terdapatnya perhubungan yang positif antara estim sendiri dan kepatuhan kepada agama.

## **Abstract**

The current study attempts to investigate the relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement of Iranian students. Other purposes of this study are investigating the relationships between self-esteem and gender, birth order position and religiosity. The research method adopted was the survey research approach using the Coopersmith's self-esteem inventory which contains 58 items. The participants were 460 first year high school students (225 boys and 235 girls) who have been chosen randomly among the five educational zones in Tabriz, Iran. For data analysis, the SPSS software has been used. The statistical analyses computed are Pearson's correlation test, t- test and ANOVA. The results show that there is low but significant correlation between self-esteem and academic achievement of high school students in Tabriz. However, there is no significant difference in term of the level of self-esteem between the two genders. Furthermore, the result shows that there is no correlation between self-esteem and birth order position. There is, however, a positive correlation between self-esteem and constancy to religiosity.

## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

#### **1.1 Introduction:**

For Iran, like many other developing countries, all problems related to education are considered significant or important since education is a major agent of development. Thus, the government has spent a lot of money to ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of the country's education system. This is evident from the annual report of the government's budget in which the education sector often gets the highest priority (Dirgaunarsa et al., 1986). For example, according to the year 2001 budget report, more than 1/3 of the Iranian government's budget was allocated for the education sector (Iran's Budget Report, 2001).

Nevertheless, despite all the efforts of preparing the facilities and educational related infrastructures, it is clear that with every ensuing year, the achievements of the Iranian students have deteriorated in comparison to the previous years. The Iran's Educational Statistical Center (IESC) has reported that the level of the students' achievement was 91.4% in 1999, 90.6% in 2000 and 89.9% in 2001. This clearly portrays the steady declining regarding the students' academic achievements in these three years period (Educational Statistical Center of Iran, 2002). Since the deterioration of the achievement in education is not only a waste of the government's money but also a waste of time on the part of the students and the educational institutions themselves, an effort to find the solution or strategy that can lead to the improvement of the current situation and to the achievement of a higher level of academic

excellence is very crucial and of the utmost importance.

Each individual student is unique and has his or her own educational related needs. The fulfillment of these needs is vital for an individual's endeavor and pursuit to achieve the academic excellence. Understanding these important needs can help educators handling students' physiological and psychological problems better thus helping the individuals to enhance their abilities and potential talents. In other words, by studying and comprehending human needs, we would have the knowledge that could help us to understand the motives and causes of others' behaviors and also it is an important step at adjusting behavioral and psychological abnormalities (Mirzabigi, 2001).

There are different kinds of basic human needs such as self-preservation, hunger, thirst, and sex, but they can be divided into two main categories:

- (i) Physiological needs: The need for food, water, and air are some of the physical needs that are vital for everyone. Therefore we attend to these needs because they are among the most basic factors of an individual's physical and mental health.
- (ii) Psychological needs: psychological needs are just as important as physiological needs and play an important role in every person's life. The examples of such needs are the needs for affection, security, achievement, self-esteem, and a sense of belonging.

From the above list of the psychological needs, self-esteem is one of the most important human needs as far as the factor that influences students'

academic achievement is concerned (Battle, 1992; Bracken, 1996). Previous studies have shown that there is a close relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement. The findings showed that the students have to do well in school in order to have positive self-esteem and vice versa. It seems self-esteem also has some relationships with other factors like motivation, gender, attitude, persistence on task, birth order, discipline and religiosity (Kennedy, 2003). Nevertheless, the main purpose of this study is to investigate the relationships between self-esteem and academic achievement, gender, birth order and religiosity among high school students in the Republic of Iran.

## **1.2 Background of the study:**

Psychologists and educational experts have had great interest and thus studied the concept of self-esteem and its relation to achievement for a long time. Both the classical and contemporary psychologists agree that “self-esteem” is part and parcel of an individual’s personality. According to Horney (1937), who was a classical psychologist, there are several ways in which people try to get a desirable self-image for themselves. Among the examples she cited are having a high sense of self-confidence, being innovative, having a good outlook about life, and being physically and mentally healthy or anything which has a direct relation with self-esteem (Battle, 1992). In order to use the maximum capacity of his thinking and also to tap into his potential talents, an individual must have a positive attitude about himself, his environment and a strong motive to work. Therefore one of the most important specifications of innovative people is having a high sense of self-esteem or a high sense of self-worth (Bracken, 1996).

Researchers in the field of psychology and more so in education often concerned with the level of academic achievement among the students. Within recent decades, among the different factors, the issue concerning the level of self-confidence and self-esteem among students and their impacts on academic achievement are the two areas of study that interest educational psychologists the most (Shamlo, 1992). They were asking a number of related general questions such as;

- (i) What factor(s) does success in life depends on?
- (ii) What are some of the reasons that make some people try to be more successful and effective in life?
- (iii) What makes some people satisfied with their current achievement while others did not and thus striving for more?
- (iv) What are the reasons that make some people interested in doing a specific line of work?
- (v) What are the factors that make people work so effectively?
- (vi) Why do some people are interested in doing high-level jobs while others, although possess the ability, are satisfied with low-level jobs and do not bother trying for better?

These and many other related questions obviously would keep the researchers quite busy.

In Islam, the concept of self-esteem has been mentioned and discussed from the beginning of the religion (during the time of prophet Muhammad s.a.w) in many of the Islamic texts. For instance, there are several verses in the Holy Quran mentioning about the esteem of human being:

*"Indeed we honored the children of Adam; provided them with means of transportation on land and sea, and also provided them lawful and pure sustenance and preferred them above many of our creature" (The Holy Qur'an- Surah Al-Israa, 70).*

In the hadith or saying of the holy prophet and from his companions' words, there are also some messages about self-esteem. For instance, it is reported that holy prophet s.a.w said; "It is not allowed for believer to humiliate himself". Also, during the last centuries, in the context of Iran, which is an Islamic country, philosophers and scientists such as a famous Iranian scholar by the name of Assad Abadi have also mentioned the concept of self in Muslims;

*"High self-esteem of Muslims was the positive point against their deterioration".*

There are some studies about self-esteem that had been conducted in Iran. For example, Shamlo (1992) have conducted a research about shyness and its relation with self-esteem, while Mirzabigi (2001) investigated the impact of self-esteem on learning. Also, the relationship between social phobia and self-esteem has been studied by Islaminasab in 1996.

The term 'self-esteem' was first used by an American psychologist by the name of William James (1842-1910). After that, other psychologists have investigated the relationships between self-esteem and other aspects of life. Neo-Freudians such as Sullivan (1892-1949) and Horney (1885-1952) had used self-concept in their personality theories. Then other psychologists had mixed the theories with practical work and concluded that the evaluation of self has significant relationship with the motives for achievement. Individuals' perception



and imagination of their own personalities and environment are very important because they shape the individual's behaviors. Subsequently, psychologists are paying more attention to the human personality, self-concepts and other related factors such as self-image, the ideal self and self-esteem. Most psychologist, however, use self-esteem as the standard for self-evaluation (Islaminasab, 1996)

### **1.3 Statement of problem**

One of the most important issues concerning educational system all over the world is preparing the students to make or get the highest possible achievement. The significance of this issue arises from the relationships between the educational system and other social, political and cultural organizations. The failure of an educational system to deal effectively with this issue leads to the underachievement of students, reflecting a waste of spending worth millions of dollars. To be more precise, a lot of potentials are left unrealized and plenty of human resources and funds are wasted. Among other effects of this phenomenon are the resultant psychological problems suffered by the underachievers and their families and also the subsequent delay in their entering into the job market. Obviously, the recognition of the causal factors contributing to underachievement is one of the most important duties of any educational system in a country.

As is true of many developing countries, in Iran also the number of academic underachievers is significant. This is shown by the number of students who had failed or dropped out of schools, reflecting a waste of valuable potential leading to adverse effects on the individuals, their families

and eventually the society. Despite earnest efforts to identify ways to enhance achievement and to combat underachievement, the problem of underachievement among school students has been on the increase year after year (Educational Statistical Center of Iran, 2002).

The issues of achievement and underachievement among students have been addressed by several Iranian researchers. However, not much attention has been paid to the psychological factors. Instead, non-psychological factors like those pertaining to the school or society have been studied. For instance, Sanai et al. (1997) investigated the effects of factors relevant to school's environment, Yahyavi (1995) focused on family factors involved in achievement and Aminfar (1981) examined the role of social factors, such as peer pressure, in academic achievement. So, since psychological aspect of an individual such as self-esteem also play an important role in influencing the success or failure of an individual, the present study aims at examining the relationships between self-esteem, one of the most important psychological needs or constructs, and academic achievement as well as with three other variables, namely birth order position, gender and religiosity. The relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement have been studied by Coopersmith (1967), Leondari et al. (1998), Schreiber and Schreiber (1995), Vinglis et al. (1998) and almost all found that there is a strong relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement. However, since none of the above mentioned studies was conducted in a non-western country, it would be interesting to see if similar findings will be found in Iran as well.

Another issue in Iranian society today is the increase of population birth rate. Consequently, this means that each family would have more children,

either male or female. Even though unequal or different parental treatments base on birth order and gender of the children has never been an issue in this country, serious emphasis should be held for the parents that they should not create any differences between or among their children and must treat them equally all the time so that it would not affect children's self-esteem. According to the Falbo (1981), Gates, Lineberger, Crockett and Hubbard (1988), Parker (1998) and Schwab & Lundgren (1978), birth order position can affect a person's level of self-esteem. On the other hand, Quatman & Watson (2001) and Reynolds et al. (2001) have conducted studies to examine the relationship between gender and self-esteem. They also, nevertheless, found that there were significant differences in term of relationships between self-esteem to either male or female individuals. Therefore, it would be interesting to see if the same findings would be found with Iranian students.

Republic of Iran is well known with its tremendous emphasis on the implementation of Islamic Religion's values, rules and principles in its society and governance. Even though for the past decade the nation seems to be more flexible and open up to more western ideas and values, there seems to be little impacts of the non-Islamic values on the people. For instance, the Iran's National Youth Organization (2002) reported that the rate of religiosity among youth in Iran is increasing by the year. Thus it is important to examine the relationship between religiosity and other construct such as self-esteem, as were done by Yong and Nolan (2001) in the opposite part of the world.

#### **1.4 The importance of the study:**

A high level of self-esteem can serve as a powerful motivational force. Because positive self-evaluations are emotionally pleasurable, we are generally motivated to act in ways that enable us to feel good about ourselves. Self-esteem takes the form of a need to enhance, protect, repair, or defend the self, and has a significant influence on our behavior (Gurney, 1987). In school, it is not uncommon for children with low self-esteem to avoid trying, for the fear of failure and the resulting blow to their levels of self-esteem. Hence, rather than trying and failing, they can rationalize that they failed only because of their lack of efforts.

It has been stated that there is evidence that children's self-esteem can be enhanced by teachers' encouragement of self-rewarding behavior on the part of their students. With increasing self-esteem comes improvement in academic performance, which in turn, enhances self-esteem. Further, above-average levels of self-esteem are associated positively with better adjustment, more independence, less defensive and deviant behavior, and greater social effectiveness and acceptance of others (Gurney, 1987).

Keegan (1987) has stated that low self-esteem either causes or contributes to neurosis, anxiety, defensiveness, drug abuse, alcoholism, depression, adolescent interpersonal problems as well as low academic achievement. A close relationship has been documented between low self-esteem and problems such as violence, alcoholism, drug abuse, eating disorders, school dropouts, teenage pregnancy, suicide, and low academic achievement.

The level of one's self-esteem comes from the standards that he chooses for the purpose of evaluating himself. This standard comes, usually, from the parents. The parents, by correcting their children's behaviors based on their own standards, is actually using themselves as a yardstick to shape the behavior of their children. Consequently, the children will in turn use their parents' opinions as a yardstick when encouraging or criticizing (Shamlo, 1992). The total satisfaction of the people depends on these judgments. If we believe in our self-worth, we will feel happy and satisfy through all phases of life and also will have good physical and mental performances. Conversely, if we don't care about our self-worth, we will be deeply embroiled in some psychological problems. A positive and kindly attitude, coupled with respect by parents to their children will give the children a positive self-esteem. Also the level of our self-esteem comes from the standards of our real abilities, value, and self-reward. Enhancing self-esteem improves performance and similarly an effective performance can increase the level of self-esteem. An individual with a high level of self-esteem will have the worth and the feeling of real satisfaction coupled with a humble attitude.

People are usually competent in some areas but not so competent in others. Those people, who have a high sense of self-esteem, pay attention to their competences and not to their shortcomings (Lawrence, 2000). These people are also ready to accept positive evaluation about themselves. Individuals with low self-esteem are more likely to accept a negative evaluation about himself. Total prosperity and the success of each individual depend on how he feels about his worth and the amount of respect that he pays himself. When facing with problems and difficulties, a high self-esteemed individual

would increase his activity and productivity and then would evaluate his performances effectively. Studies show that self-esteem has a meaningful relation with self-reliance, self-image and self-worth (Vejdanparast, 1999).

Feeling good about oneself is a basic need in life. We need to know ourselves physically and mentally. This feeling will motive and stimulate us to be successful in all our duties. One of which is achieving academic success. Every country allocates a heavy budget for education and this should be used correctly to increase the feeling of worth and academic achievement in the students. It is clear that using the budget incorrectly brings about the existence of many problems such as wasting the time of the students and teachers and bringing about the non-actualization of the potential talents in them.

This research therefore is very important because it promotes the understanding of one of the most important factors for the educational success or failure of the students. It will help the educational authorities to know more about the effects of self-esteem in relations to the academic achievements, so that they can help the students to increase their self-esteem and self-reliance and consequently be more successful in achieving academic excellence.

The relationships between self-esteem and academic achievement have been investigated in different countries by several researchers (Coopersmith, 1967; Edmondson & White, 1998; Leonadri et al., 1998; Morris & Lee, 1993; Purkey, 1970; Schreiber & Schreiber, 1995). The studies cited were conducted in western countries or non-Muslim societies. Therefore, the conclusions drawn cannot be generalized to Muslim countries because the Islamic countries are fundamentally and systematically different from the non-Islamic countries.

Differences in Islamic fundamentalism, socialization process, education, philosophy, religion, culture, family life and child rearing are some of them. The factors mentioned have been reviewed by some researchers such as Cassidy (2000), Coopersmith (1967), Ho et al. (1995), Mullis & Chapman (2000), Watkins et al. (1997), and Yong and Nolan (2001) who studied about relation between religion and self-esteem.

In Islamic countries, specifically in Iran, all aspects of life are controlled and guided by the religion's doctrines as it provides guidelines on all aspects on life such as those related to the family life, child rearing practices and relations between men and women. In Iranian community, the family system is based on unquestionable respect towards parents and elders. People are obliged to respect their elders and obey their parents. Children born in such families are under the control of their parents so that their socializations take place with assuming a more prominent role for the family than any other social institutions. Furthermore, the family system in Iran is commonly of the extended type where the sons normally are still obliged to live with their parents even after marriage. However, in the western societies, the family system is usually nuclear and the role of the social institutions is as significant if not more as the role of the family. Therefore, the results obtained from this research are expected to be different from those obtained from researches conducted in western and non-Muslim societies.

Another difference between the western and Islamic systems refers to child rearing. In Islam the aim of child rearing is bringing up children to be a good Muslim, who performs his duties as a Muslim to the best of his ability. This

objective is indoctrinated into the child from birth and he is always aware of it. Such a religious belief may not be prominent in western societies and therefore, the results obtained from this study may be quite different from those obtained from researches in western societies.

According to Mullis & Chapman (2000) and Watkins et al. (1997), gender appears to be one of the influential factors in self-esteem. In western and/or non-Muslim societies there are no restrictions to the relations between the two sexes, granting them to have free relations with one another. In contrast, in Iran, as an Islamic country, relations between the two sexes are extremely restricted by certain regulations, preventing them from meeting each other freely. Even the educational settings are different, with members of each sex attending segregated schools. This fact could possibly influence the self-esteem of the students. Consequently, the findings of this research are expected to differ from those of in the western societies.

According to the Coopersmith (1967), Ho et al.(1995) there is significant relationship between family and self-esteem. Also Cassidy (2000) stated that there is a relationship between self-esteem and culture. The family is the basic unit of civilization. From this point of view this research focuses on Iranian society where the structure of the family is different from that of western countries and therefore, it seems quite natural that the results be different from those of other research conducted in the west.

It has been documented that birth order has a significant correlation with self-esteem (Parker, 1998). First-born children tend to possess higher self-esteem than second or later born children (Gates et al. 1988; Gecas & Pasley



1983; Kidwell 1980; Lee 1995; and Romeo 1994). In Iran, where the importance of the male child is still paramount, it is expected that male children irrespective of their birth order will possess high self-esteem on account of receiving more favorable reactions from the parents in particular and from the society in general, and experiencing more leniency and less criticism which would enhance their family self-esteem.

On the other hand, since traditionally, girls are considered less important or inferior to boys, they do not enjoy the unrestrained freedom accorded to boys. Girls are compelled by social norms to conform to stereotypical roles and transgressions are met with unfavorable reactions from parents and other members of the society. So, it is anticipated that self-esteem of girls will be lower than that of boys regardless of their birth order.

Furthermore, in western societies, a number of researchers like Israel et al. (2002), Marcotte et al. (2002), Mullis & Chapman (2000), Quatman & Watson (2001), Reynolds et al. (2001), Usmani & Daniluk (1997), Watkins et al (1997), have noted the gender differences. Their findings were rather similar to those described by Porsharifei (1992), Shokrkon & Nisi (1987) and Tarkhan (1994) who claim that girls are more depressive and stressful, and have lower self-esteem in the areas of physical abilities, reading and mathematics compared with boys. Such differences have been attributed to the quality of home environment and cultural background. All these studies have pointed to higher self-esteem among boys. However, in view of the recent changes in the academic performances of boys and girls as evidenced by a larger number of girls entering tertiary education, it appears that the long standing gender differences may be reversing in direction. Over the past 5 years, the percentage

of Iranian girl school leavers who pass the nation wide university entrance exam is significantly more than the percentage of the boys. The recent trend has been for girls to outnumber the boys 60% to 40%, respectively. Thus, it appears reasonable to suspect that girls are now be enjoying higher self-esteem than boys as their superior academic achievements show (ISNA Press, 2001).

In short, at present, even though the cultural background still favors the males, the females are actually performing better in term of the academic achievement. Thus, the issue of self-esteem merits attention. It is speculated that the correlation between self-esteem and academic achievement among students completing guidance school may not be as clear cut as it was in the past. Hence the present study purports to clarify the correlation involving few other factors such as birth order, gender and religious practices.

### **1.5 The objectives of the study:**

This study aims:

- i) to examine the relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement among the Iranian students.
- ii) to investigate the relationship between self-esteem and birth order of the Iranian students.
- iii) to determine the degree or level of self-esteem among the male and female students in Iran.
- iv) to investigate the relationship between self-esteem and religiosity of the Iranian students.

## 1.6 Research Questions

The corresponding research questions and the rationale for their formations are:

- i) What is the degree of relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement among the Iranian students?

According to the Coopersmith (1967), Leondari et al. (1998), Schreiber & Schreiber (1995), Smith (1969), Vinglis et al. (1998), there is a strong relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement, but all of these preceding studies have been done in the western countries which are entirely different from Iran. This research is going to find out whether there is any correlation between self-esteem and academic achievement among the participating Iranian students.

- ii) What is the degree of relationship between birth order and self-esteem of Iranian students?

According to the Falbo (1981), Gates & Lineberger & Crockett and Hubbard (1988), Parker (1998) and Schwab & Lundgren (1978), birth order position can affect a person's level of self-esteem. Thus, the current research is going to find out whether there is any relationship between self-esteem and birth order of Iranian students and the relationship to the academic achievement.

- iii) What is the degree of self-esteem among Iranian male and female students?

According to the Quatman & Watson (2001) and Reynolds et al. (2001), there is a difference in the degree of self-esteem between genders. So, this

research intends to investigate if such differences of self-esteem between different do exist genders among Iranian students.

iv) What is the degree of relationship between self-esteem and religiosity of Iranian Students?

According to the Yong and Nolan (2001), there is a relationship between self-esteem and religiosity based on the studies done in the western countries. To date, however, there is no such evidence on this matter in Iran. Thus, this research is intended to discover the existence of such relationship between self-esteem and religiosity in Iran.

### **1.7 Research Hypotheses:**

**H 1:** There is a strong positive correlation between self-esteem of the Iranian students and their academic achievement.

**H 2:** It is expected that the middle born Iranian students have higher self-esteem than the eldest born and the youngest born students.

**H 3:** It is to be expected that male Iranian students have significantly higher self-esteem than the females.

**H 4:** There is a relationship between religiosity of Iranian students and their self-esteem.

### **1.8 Operational definitions:**

(i) **Self-esteem:** The Evaluation of an individual about his self-esteem or his judgment about his value (Coopersmith, 1967). In this research, students

respond to a set of questions containing evaluation of an individual about his own characteristics determined by using “Coopersmith’s self-esteem inventory”. The analysis of this instrument will produce the score which reflect the level of one’s self-esteem (Refer to a particular instrument in Appendix C).

(ii) **Academic achievement:** Academic achievement connotes to securing marks in examinations. In this research project the academic achievement of the students connotes first semester of sample group in high school for the academic year 2002.

(iii) **Birth order:** In this research the birth order is in 4 levels; 1- First born 2- Second born 3-Third born 4- Last born

(iv) **First year students:** The first year students, among whom self-esteem inventory was distributed, have been given the nationwide exam in the last year of guidance schools (previous year). The Ministry of Education gives this exam for all of the students in their last year of guidance school, which shows a clear report about each of the students.

(v) **Structure of the educational system in Iran:** The educational system of Iran consists of one year pre-school (kindergarten), five years of primary school, three years of guidance school and four years of high school (Ministry of Education, 2001).

## **Chapter II**

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

#### **2.1 Introduction:**

The aim of this chapter is to give an overall view about the concept of self-esteem and its components such as the definition, categories, levels, affecting factors, and sources as well as its relationship with religion. Then a number of related theories are being discussed. This chapter also elaborates the findings of some of the previous studies carried out in this area of research. Finally, the theoretical framework of this study is being explained.

#### **2.2 Knowledge about self:**

Mansour (1991) believes that knowledge about self is one of the principles of mental health. Anyone may have strengths and weaknesses in performing a different activity. Those who are aware of their potential powers are more familiar with their surroundings and actuality; therefore they are rarely involved in abnormalities. In 1988, Gurney claimed that one of the most important programs of mental health is giving people more information about their physical and mental abilities. We must understand ourselves as we actually are, and should never dream of unreachable ambitions. If we understand that others are smarter and more active than us, we should accept the reality and respect them.

We know that we cannot live without having understanding about ourselves. Each person gradually evaluates his potentials and improves them up to the acceptable levels. On the other hand, mankind lives by imagining of

his or her self-worth and always tries to protect it from any damages. Therefore, there are many ways to prevent self-worth from inferiority situations and convert it at the acceptable levels. If there is any problem or failure, individual cannot continue his life normally.

The efforts to know one self have started since the beginning of life and will never finish. Vejdanparast (1999) points out that to have enough knowledge about self, one needs to have insights about what an individual thinks and what the reality is. If these two images get close to one another, the maturity of the individual will appear. Another important issue is the relationship between the supposition of that individual about himself and how others think of him. Ordinary people easily accept the facts which others realize about them and never attribute their negative characteristics to others.

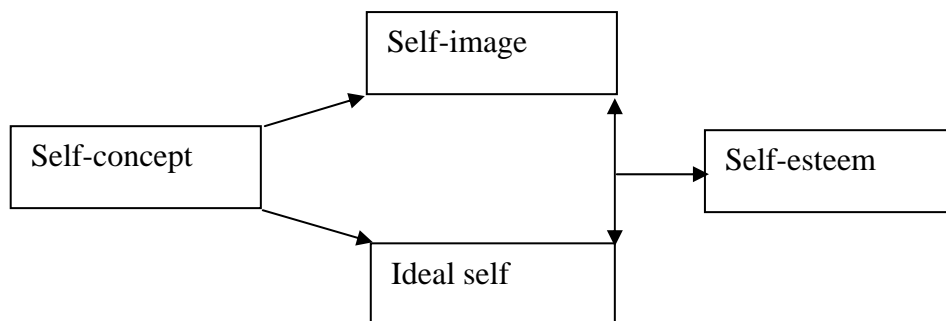
Feeling self-identity in adolescent is formed on the basis of some kind of imitations during childhood. Children's criteria and moral standards are almost similar to those of their parents. Therefore, children's self-esteem is based on the attitudes of their parents. At school age, children pay more attention to the criteria of peer groups and care for the teachers and adults' evaluations. If the criteria of parents, teachers and friends become similar to one another, seeking identity will be easier. But if the opinion of the parents and teachers are different from those of the peers and other outstanding people in the adolescents' lives, these adolescents would probably end up in some kind of identity conflicts and role confusion (Atkinson & Feather, 1966).

## 2.3 Self-concept:

Self-concept is a psychological term that is used every day. For the purpose of this study, a person's self-concept is defined as an awareness of the mental and physiological attributes that make up a person, together with their feelings about their attributes. It is an umbrella term beneath which lies the concept of self-image, ideal self and self-esteem (Lawrence, 2000).

Figure 2.1: The relationship between Self-concept, Self-image, Ideal-self and Self-esteem

(Lawrence, 2000)



Source: D.Lawrence (2000). *Building self-esteem with adult learners*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd.

Figure 2.1 shows how a person's self-esteem is depending on the relationship between his self-image and ideal self.

### 2.3.1 Self-image:

If someone asks: "Who are you?", most people would list their mental and physical characteristics that make up their unique being together. The self-image begins to form shortly after birth. Gradually, the self-image is enlarged as the baby comes into contact with the environment. The development of this process normally begins by the parents. The process continues throughout babyhood and into childhood. As they mingle with their teachers and with other people, children learn many other things about themselves. At adulthood, most



of us have many kinds of skills and abilities. The more experience we have, the richer our self-image will be (Gurney, 1988).

### **2.3.2 *Ideal-self:***

As awareness develops in children and their self-image begins to form, they begin to be aware that the adults around them reward certain kinds of behavior in them. Therefore the ideal self begins to form as they learn that there are standards of behavior and levels of achievements which adults value. They are learning that there are socially desirable things that are valued in the kind of society in which they live and it is these values that form the ideal self. In brief, the ideal self is a collection of ideal values, standards of behavior and ability to which a person aspires (Lawrence, 2000).

The self-ideal is the imagination of what any person would prefer to possess which may come true or not (Mansour, 1991). When self-concept and self-ideal become identical, the individual will have high self-esteem and vice versa. Everyone should be aware of their abilities and know how to use them fully so that they can feel satisfied. Apparently, that is necessary for the mental health and psychological stability of most students that we help them to feel worthy (Vasta, Harbith & Miller, 1992).

## **2.4 Self-esteem**

Self-esteem is an evaluative phenomenon. It is an individual's evaluation of oneself based on his or her perceived self-image. Many adults have fairly good ideas of the kind of people they are and also of the kind of people they would like to be. Self-esteem can be broadly defined as the overall evaluation of

oneself in either a positive or negative way. Self-esteem is essentially one's own feeling of self-competence and self-worth (Islaiminasab, 1996).

#### **2.4.1 The definition of self-esteem:**

Self-esteem is the evaluation of the discrepancy between self-image and ideal self (Lawrence, 2000). It is also the disposition to experience oneself as competent to cope with the basic challenges of life and as worthy of happiness (Branden, 1987). The perception the individual possesses of his own worth (Battle, 1992). It is the sense of self worth and competence that people associate with their self-concepts (Bandura, 1977). Self-esteem is the reflection of the evaluation which a person has of himself. It is the domain of individual's beliefs about his ability and worth. From the point of view of Coopersmith (1967), self-esteem is personal judgment about self-worthy. It is mental experience that makes the difference between speech and observable behavior of people, optimistic and downbeat evaluations that have different effect on people's self-esteem. The person who has low self-esteem is not confident. They are more in effect of social evaluations and pay more attention to these evaluations. According to the above definitions, self-esteem can be defined as continuous evaluation of individual about worth of himself.

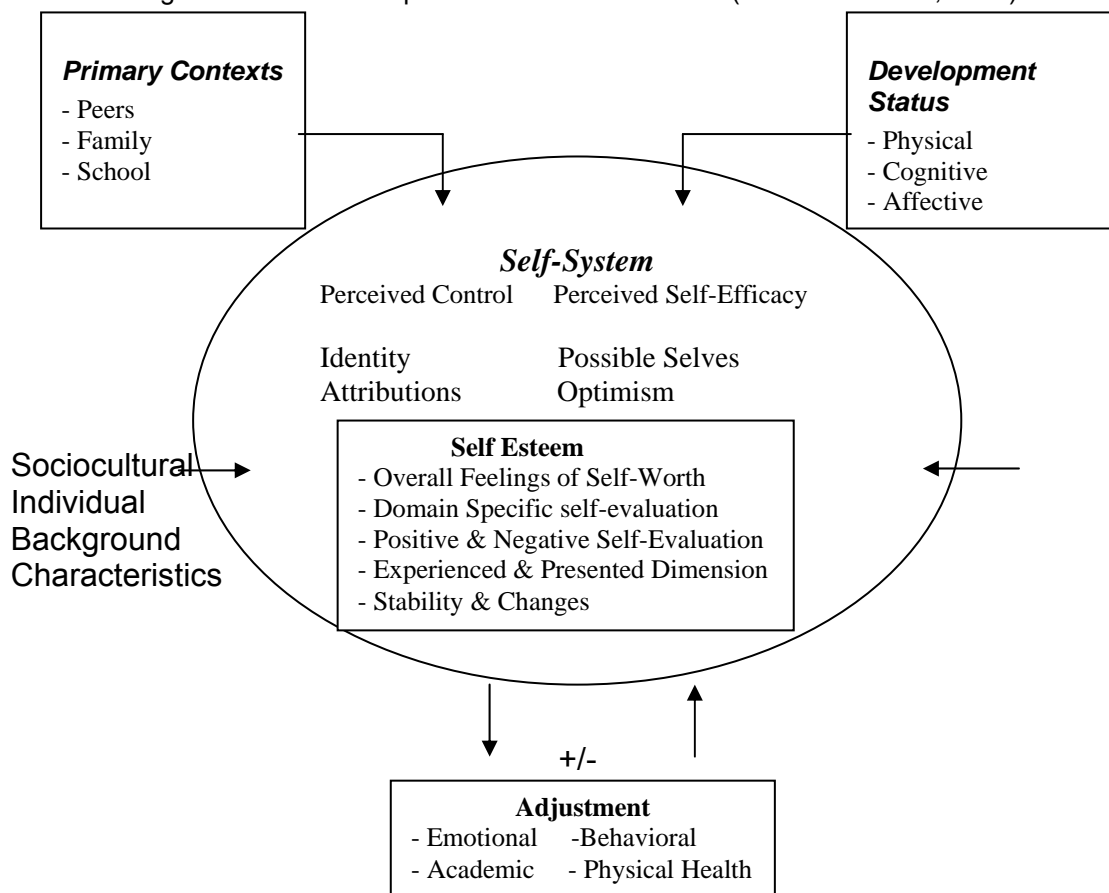
#### **2.4.2 The concept of self-esteem**

The review of the literature has shown that there are two types of concept of self-esteem, namely 'unidirectional' and 'multidirectional' self-esteem. The unidirectional or traditional concept of self-esteem views self-esteem globally, one directional and independent of any direct influence. Harter (1990) has conducted a study based on the theoretical understanding that the self is a social construct. His findings shown that the global self-esteem has had

big impact on the feelings and other affective domains, particularly of the adolescence. He however found out that there was no correlation between self-esteem and the physical appearance domain of a person, thus concluded that there is no relationship between these internal and external aspects of an individual.

DuBois & Hirsch (2000) however, offered a different view on the conceptual understanding of self-esteem. Their findings actually supported the notion that a person's self-esteem is structurally 'multidimensional', and is influenced by various individual's contextual factors which are independent of each other and are complex. To further clarify their views, Dubois and Hirsch has developed a model of adolescence's concept of self-esteem (Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2: The Conceptual Model of Self-Esteem (DuBois & Hirsch, 2000)



Source: D.L. DuBois and B.J. Hirsh. (2000). Self-Esteem in early adolescence: From stock character to marquee attraction. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 20 (1), 5-11.